DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 884 CS 512 117

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TITLE	Leading to Great Places in the Elementary Classroom.
INSTITUTION	MarcoPolo Education Foundation.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.; International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE	2003-02-28
NOTE	7p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Managing Editor, ReadWriteThink, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. E-mail: comments@readwritethink.org. For full text: http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescent Literature; *Childrens Literature; Elementary Education; Lesson Plans; Reader Response; Writing Assignments; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes

ABSTRACT

The lead of a story is the beginning, and yet it can be the end if the reader is not entranced immediately. This lesson examines types of leads in prominent children's literature and asks grade 3 to 5 students to try their own hand at writing leads. During the two 40-minute lessons, students will: discuss their reactions to the leads from the various texts; compare different leads from young adult literature; develop a lead for a shared, read-aloud text; present their new lead orally and share why they selected the type of lead they utilized; and revise the lead in a piece of their own writing. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the project are included. Attached are seven possible leads to read aloud to the class to demonstrate how setting, action, character, reflection, event, or dialogue can lead readers into a story. (RS)

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Leading to Great Places in the Elementary Classroom

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ED 480 884

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Grade Band

3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

Two 40-minute sessions

Overview

The lead of a story is the beginning, and yet it can be the end if the reader is not entranced immediately. This lesson examines examples of leads in children's literature such as setting, action, character, reflection, event, and dialogue in a shared reading experience. Students are asked to then generate different leads for a read aloud book in the classroom. Finally, students are asked to complete the reading writing connection by writing or revising a lead in one of their one pieces of writing.

"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

From Theory to Practice

Atwell, Nancie. 1998. *In the Middle Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

In *In the Middle Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*, Atwell suggests that "mini-lessons on leads helps students internalize stylistic concerns". Moreover, exposing students to different kinds of leads helps students see the importance of voice and how people respond to the literature.

Lane, Barry. 1993. *After the End Teaching and Learning Creative Revision.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Teachers looking for examples of how to go from theory to practice should consult Lane's *After the End Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*. His approaches are well grounded in research but also provide timely examples to get accomplish the goal of getting students to revise.

Student Objectives

Students will

- discuss their reactions to the leads from the various texts.
- compare different leads from young adult literature.
- develop a lead for a shared, read aloud text.
- present their new lead orally and share why they selected the type of lead they utilized.
- revise the lead in a piece of their own writing.

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Resources

- Great Leads Handout
- Copy of selected texts from student handout
- Notecards
- Overhead of lead from a shared text

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Great Leads, Handout
- Notecards
- One copy of each selected text from student handout
- Overhead of lead from a shared text
- Writer's notebook

Preparation

1. Read over sample leads provided to determine which ones to share with the class.
2. Collect texts for the samples selected.
3. Copy selected leads for each student.
4. Make an overhead of the lead from a shared class text such as the most recent read aloud. It would be most useful to select a lead from a novel that the class enjoyed but felt was a slow starter.

Instuction and Activities

Session One

1. Hand out a notecard to each student. Ask students to number the notecard according to the number of leads you have selected to read aloud.
2. Using the structure of a focus lesson, introduce the concepts of leads by sharing examples from selected text. The order of the leads shared should match the order in which they are printed on the student handout.
3. Students place a simple rating after each number according to how they liked the lead which was read aloud. Suggested rating might include (+)or (-) or one , two or three stars.
4. After you have read aloud all of the sample leads, distribute the student handout with the leads printed and categorized.
5. Using pairs, small groups or a whole class arrangement, invite students to discuss why they rated each lead as they did. If pairs or small groups are used, take some time to invite students to share with the whole class some of their impressions of the leads shared reminding them that readers experience the texts differently.
6. Close the lesson by letting students know they will be applying their experiences with leads to a text that the whole class has in common so they should keep the handout in a place where it can be easily accessed again.
7. Many students will be interested in reading some of the books which samples were taken from. You should be prepared to allow time and/or access to those novels. Ideally, this lesson can be completed shortly before students are asked to self select for independent reading or for an author study.
8. Collect the notecards for assessment purposes.

Session Two

1. In a focus lesson format, invite students to join you with the handout of sample leads, their

writing notebook, and a pen/pencil.
2. Display the lead from the read aloud book on an overhead, while sharing it orally.
3. In pairs, invite students to create two new leads for the text, using a strategy demonstrated from the student handout: Great Leads. For example, if the text uses a lead built around the setting, encourage the pairs to create a lead that uses another strategy, such as dialogue.
4. Give the students time in class to complete the task. Let them know they will be sharing the new leads they have crafted. Ideally, the teacher crafts a lead during this time as well. If the class requires more active monitoring, you can draft a lead as part of the preparation for this lesson.
5. After sufficient time to draft, ask students to volunteer to share their favorite new lead and explain why they chose the type of lead they did. You may need to share your sample to get the discussion going. The book covers and newly written leads could be displayed as a bulletin board with a before and after feature.
6. Based upon the experience, students will revise the lead on one of their own pieces of writing. Depending upon the classroom, it could be a teacher or student selected piece.

Extension

Within the classroom, post great leads along with the book jacket. Challenge students to find great leads. When they find leads they believe to be worthy of being posted they can share them with the class before posting them. This will reinforce the skill and continue to generate interest in books.

Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Teacher observation and notes: specifically noting who participated through discussion and as evidence on the notecards.

2. Collect samples of student work representing the lead before this lesson and after.

NCTE/IRA Standards

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

9 - Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Great Leads

Possible leads to read aloud to the class to demonstrate how setting, action, character, reflection, event, or dialogue can lead you into a story:

- Barker, Clive. *The Thief of Always*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

  "The Great Gray beast February had eaten Harvey Swick alive. Here he was, buried in the belly of that smothering month.

- Buell, Janet. *Bog Bodies*. Twenty-First Century Books, 1997.

  Soggy peat squished beneath archaeologist Rick Turner's boots as he scanned the cut bank of the peat bog. The English air hung damp and think, and gray clouds covered the August sun. A steady drone from the harvesting machine mingled with sounds of traffic and chirping birds. On the far side of the bog, peat men labored. The workers were finally back at their jobs, the memory of yesterday's events beginning to fade from their minds."

- Fleischman, Paul. *Weslandia*. Candlewick Press, 1999.

  "Of course he's miserable," moaned Wesley's mother. He sticks out." "Like a nose," snapped his father.

- Philbrick, Rodman. *Freak the Mighty*. Scholastic, 2001.

  "I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for awhile, and that's the truth, the whole truth. The unvanquished truth, is how Freak would say it..."

- Philbrick, Rodman. *The Last Book in the Universe*. Scholastic Signature, 2000.

  "If You're reading this, it must be a thousand years from now. Because nobody around here reads anymore. Why bother when you can just probe it?"

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- Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. Dell Yearling, 1998.

  "There is no lake at Camp Green Lake. There once was a very large lake here, the largest in Texas. That was over a hundred years ago. Now it is just a dry, flat wasteland.

  There used to be a town of Green Lake as well. The town shriveled and dried up along with the lake, and the people who lived there.

  During the summer the daytime temperature hovers around ninety-five degrees in the shade-if you can find any shade. There's not much shade in a big dry lake.

  The only trees are two old oaks on the eastern edge of the "lake". A hammock is stretched between the two trees, and a log cabin stands between that.

  The campers are forbidden to lie in the hammock. It belongs to the Warden. The Warden owns the shade.

  Out on the lake, rattlesnakes and scorpions find shade under rocks and in the holes dug by the campers."

- White, E.B. *Charlotte's Web*. Dell Publishing. 1969.

  "Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

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